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THE PATRICIAN ELEMENT IN AMERICAN SOCIETY.

THE desire to look back upon an ancestry and forward to a family is universally found, wherever man has organized any form of state and society, however high or however low it may be. The inheritance and transmission of a name form a large share of the pride and the ambition of life; and if wealth and power go with the name the sum of human happiness is considered nearly complete. To secure this, strong governments are organized, strong constitutions are adopted, strong laws are enacted, great classes are built up and built upon as a firm foundation. As a present possession it is nourished and cherished; as a lost possession its blessed memory is always held dear,—so dear that even the beggar is proud to turn to the gilded palaces of his ancestors, and patient to wait for the returning tide of prosperity and greatness. The legitimist accepts it as the corner-stone of his position and power; the republican offers it as a boon to all ranks and orders of men, a right which neither usurpation nor law can overthrow. The idea of family purity, strength, wisdom, prudence, success, ambition, goes with it, and has gone with it from the days when the patriarchs secured and transmitted their power, down to our own time when all men are struggling for honors and prosperity for themselves and their children. Upon the combination of the ancient families of Fabii, Romilii, Voltinii, was founded the Roman state; and from the legal relations of the social and civil circle thus formed sprang the burgesses of Rome—the *Patricii*, so called because they were recognized as the sons of fathers, the only fathers known to Roman law. In this class there was entire social and civil equality, and from this class the ruler was chosen, whose command was all-powerful when his authority had been properly conferred, and the fidelity and obedience of the community had

been invoked and secured. The same principles and the same classification lay at the foundation of the Greek republics. And when the Roman society in Gaul was destroyed by the German invasion, and all social organization both of conqueror and conquered was dissolved, the patrician element was the first to reëstablish itself in a form corresponding with new necessities and obligations and designs. England, too, whether as part of the Roman empire, or under the Saxon kings, or parceled out by William the Conqueror among his followers, was subject to the same social element, and has, through all its years of conquest, wealth, and power, encouraged, supported, and leaned upon this proud and undying vital force. Wherever imperialism has advanced, the *Patricii* have been found in the forefront, contending, asserting, controlling, and building up the great institutions which are man's pride and glory, and which mark his divine power on the earth.

The commanding spirit which has always and under all circumstances established the patrician element in society, is not more striking than the conservative wisdom and foresight with which it has endeavored to lay for itself firm and enduring foundations. The original qualification of the Roman *Patricii* was in landed property; and the conversion of this qualification into personal property and money-rating is considered one of the revolutionary movements which threatened to overthrow the whole social and civil fabric, the modification of which by Quintus Fabius is counted as a fair offset to his startling introduction of the sons of freedmen into the senate, and his reckless and audacious expenditure of public moneys without senatorial sanction. The landlords and their dependents constituted a large mass of the people, and, in the relations established between them, the former reserved to themselves unlimited right of possession, and established a great landed nobility. And we are told that "the landlords, occupying a comparatively elevated and free position, supplied the community with its natural leaders and rulers,"—the patriciate upon whose energy and intelligence the state was supposed to be founded. This social condition the Romans carried with them wherever they went. They carried it into Gaul and preserved it there so long as their rule continued, fixing it so firmly that it outlived even the German invasion, and converted the invading hordes from wandering tribes into landed proprietors and finally into a great territorial aristocracy, arro-

gating to themselves the spirit of individual liberty and the passion for independence and individuality which the Germans brought into this part of the Roman world. In England, moreover, whose constitution, Montesquieu tells us, came from the forests of Germany, whence came also the original doctrines of human equality and civil right, the history of the feudal tenure, as the foundation of a powerful privileged class, is interesting and significant. Originally Great Britain was occupied by agrarian communities similar to those in Germany. These communities were nearly destroyed by the Saxon kings, and what they left unmolested the Norman conquest wholly obliterated. The statutes as early as the thirteenth century forbade all complaints of the tenant against the lord of the manor. And step by step it has been brought about that, of the noble stock of free tenants that has given so marked a stamp to the English character, and has established so much freedom in the English constitution,—the free men and proprietors of the Saxon times,—hardly any now remains, until England has become the only civilized nation where property in land has been entirely taken from the hands of those who cultivate it. A legal system based on “the principle of inalienability from the feudal lien,” and in the interest of great landed families and the establishment of peasant proprietorship with absolute dependence, has given the landed aristocracy of England their vast and imposing power, and has created a patriciate unequalled for strength and grandeur in any age or any country. According to M. Marriott: “The destruction of small property is still going on, no longer, however, by encroachment, but by purchase. Whenever land comes into the market, it is bought by some rich capitalist, because the expenses of legal inquiry are too great for a small investment. Thus large properties are consolidated, and fall, so to speak, into mortmain, in consequence of the law of primogeniture and entail. In the fifteenth century, according to Chancellor Fortescue, England was quoted throughout Europe for the number of its proprietors and the comfort of its inhabitants. In 1688, Gregory King estimates that there were 180,000 proprietors, exclusive of 16,560 proprietors of noble rank. In 1786, there were 250,000 proprietors in England. According to the ‘Domesday Book’ of 1876, there were 170,000 rural proprietors in England, owning above an acre; 21,000 in Ireland, and 8000 in Scotland. A fifth part of the entire country is in the hands of 523 persons. ‘Are you

aware,' said Mr. Bright in a speech delivered at Birmingham, August 27, 1866, 'that one-half of the soil of Scotland belongs to ten or twelve persons? Are you aware of the fact that the monopoly of landed property is continually increasing, and becoming more and more exclusive?'"

The power of a patriciate thus founded is imposing; its conflicts are intense; its fate the most profoundly interesting political problem of our day.

It is not, however, on the material foundations of the patrician element in society that the mind dwells with the most interest. The influence of social and civil institutions upon man's intellectual and moral nature, the effects of luxury and ease, of poverty and hardship, the operation of laws of heredity—all combine to make the individual man what he is, and to establish controlling national characteristics. It is not until man surrounds himself with fortunate circumstances, with prosperity, comfort, opportunities for the exercise of his best faculties, that he is developed to that standard in the scale of being required for great endeavor and high accomplishment. The marks produced by centuries of oppression, poverty, wrong, starvation, upon a people possessing originally great human beauty and strength, both mentally and physically, are well known to every student of the history of the race. The heavy countenances, rude features, low, misshapen forms of the generations of sufferers, are the painful record which long-continued misfortune always makes. Man, like the higher orders of vegetable growth, requires genial influences for his development; not always prosperity and wealth, but always a life in which his faculties are not dwarfed. Precisely what influences affect him, it is difficult to say. There is a form of prosperity in which his finer faculties may be wholly destroyed from generation to generation; and there are forms of apparent adversity in which all that is noble in him is quickened and developed. In the transmission of mere physical faculties, he seems to rise superior to the laws which control the lower animal kingdom, and to defy them all. He is not physically powerful, it is true, but he is physically enduring; and, through the agency of his spirit, physically triumphant over space and time. At a certain point he leaves the animal economy and soars into the regions of a diviner power; lives and works in spite of disease; implants upon his race, through the agency of his soul, faculties, moral and intellectual, which be-

come at last a part of his physical organization ; and proclaims everywhere and in every way that he is not a beast ; and we reverently and devoutly recognize the Divine power which manifested itself, not so much when it made the earth and the sea, as when it breathed into man an immortal spirit. There is no doubt that man's moral character and mental power, his tastes, modes of thought, impulse, and inspiration, his peculiarities and his physical organization even, are due not only to the qualities transmitted to him by many generations of ancestors, but also to the modifying influences of associations, interests, habits of thought and life, occupations, affections which surrounded him and his fathers before they began to draw the breath of life. Man's spiritual impressions are a law unto his body, and, as he steps forth into life, he carries not only his ancestral shape and feature, but those higher powers which mold his form, give light to his countenance, and receive their existence from the Divine hand which, because it is spiritual, has made and ruled the material world from the dawn of creation. Indeed, the subtle and delicate forces which combine to work out human characteristics come not with observation in all cases, and exert an influence as great as, perhaps greater than, manifest and well-known physical laws. We may study with the utmost care and audacity the natural history of man, his relations to other animals, his antiquity on the globe, and the primitive state of the human species, but we cannot escape from the overwhelming evidence of the influences exerted upon his character and structure by the circumstances which have surrounded the generations to which he belongs. Hence the well-known qualities of the patrician element in every society ; and hence the well-known qualities of the oppressed, and unfortunate, and subservient. The difference which exists in form and feature, and mind and heart, the difference in the proportion in which the attractive and effective, and the unattractive and inefficient, are mingled in each, are too well known to require description.

Now, the foundation and strength, the origin and extent, of the patrician element in American society, indeed, the question whether or not it has an existence distinctly defined here, constitute an interesting and important problem in modern sociology. The structure of American society has not materially changed since the settlement of the colonies. "Nothing came from Europe but a free people," says the enthusiastic historian, as he

contemplates the character of those who laid the foundation of state and society on these shores, and whom one less sympathetic and admiring has described as a stock "plebeian though ingenious." They came here from every walk in life,—the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the patrician and the plebeian,—all either inspired by, or compelled to accept, or ready to acquiesce in, the doctrines of free government and social equality. Whatever may have been the condition or the nationality of these people at home, they seem to have adopted, through necessity or choice, the constitutional principles of the Germans, whose independence and individuality found free scope in these remote, unsettled regions. There was colonial diversity enough, it is true,—the colonies in New England and New York and Virginia and the Carolinas differing, in many points, almost as much as they would have done had they been different nationalities. But everywhere the largest civil liberty took possession of the popular mind and prevailed. The strongest element of society here was the liberal and protesting and non-conforming element, and to it all others surrendered. There may have been a conservative claim for classification, caste, and legitimacy; but it was the weaker element which laid the claim. That vital force which manifested the most power in the beginning, and which endured even unto the end, was never stronger than it was when the Declaration of Independence laid down the maxim that "all men are created equal." It was not the politico-ecclesiastical government of John Endicott, or the Puritan-modified liberality of John Winthrop, or the constitution of John Locke in the Carolinas, or the social distinctions of Virginia, or the easy, compromising adjustment of the Dutch colonies in New York, which laid the eternal foundations of the American Government, and gave American society its enduring characteristics. All these colonies had their purpose; but, so far as the problem of government was concerned, they were acquiescent, and, through the force of circumstances, they accepted the broad, liberal, humane theories laid down for them by those who, at Plymouth, organized a government on the consent of the governed, and recognized personal merit in their selection of magistrates. To this ascendancy of the best republican thought throughout the general colonial life, we may undoubtedly attribute that amazing vitality which the American Government manifestly possesses, and that ready capacity to meet great civil emergencies which

the American people have thus far shown. As a stream rises never higher than its fountain, so a nation, in all its dominant characteristics, however glittering and attractive may be its accidents, seldom loses the elements of its infant life; and that people is most fortunate which finds necessity and occasion, as time goes on, to develop its original and fundamental principles, and in its progress can turn back with the proud satisfaction that it has everything to do and nothing to undo in the line laid down for it in the beginning. Is it a question of civil rights—the law and the doctrine can be found in the system of government planted at Plymouth. Is it a question of religious toleration, or of a voice in the government, or of the division of landed property, or of social equality—the reply may be found in the principles and practice applied at Plymouth. In congratulating themselves on the national strength which this fortunate outset has secured, the American people should not forget that it has modified and shaped all their social and civil institutions, and made them peculiarly their own. It would be impossible to plant the territorial aristocracy of Rome, or the landed proprietorship of England, on soil cultivated by the American colonists, with any hope or prospect of success; nor do we find there any social classification applicable to the United States. Whatever social and civil conditions, therefore, are here provided for the prosperous and the unprosperous, for the rich and the poor, for the idle and the industrious, for the producers and the non-producers, they are all provided in accordance with that unchanged and apparently unchangeable law on which the American Government is founded. And whenever, through temptation or trial, this law is broken, and the republic wanders in search of other systems of state and society, and the faith and practice of the fathers are forgotten, the decay, or a change worse than decay, will manifestly begin.

In considering the patrician element in American society, we cannot forget the strong roots which these free republican principles have sent down into American soil. That there was a controlling element in the early colonial life, no one can deny,—an element which exists in one form or another to-day. It was an element which, without establishing a social class, did establish a national reputation and give direction to the national character. Diffused through the entire mass of the people, it came at once into possession of all the forces which, in other

lands and in other times, had created those great social distinctions, which decrees, and constitutions, and laws had confirmed and strengthened. The business of building up and increasing national power, which had especially belonged to a recognized patriciate elsewhere, was taken up by the American colonists as a popular duty, and was pursued with the solemn conviction that every man living under a government had a right to a voice in its conduct and to a share of its benefit and protection. The power and duty which had hitherto devolved upon the few at the expense of the many, now fell into the hands of the great body politic, without distinction of person. There were no conquerors to reward, no retainers to be provided for, no vanquished to be despoiled, no warriors to be enriched. They had an abundance of land and of good blood,—the corner-stones of all patriciates; and they proceeded to erect a social fabric, in which the controlling element became the property of the people, and passed from hand to hand, from man to man, from family to family, until it became impossible to designate or limit its possessors short of the great body of the community. Magistrates were found in every house, and were summoned into the service of the state from every profession and calling. Property was placed within the reach of all the industrious and thrifty; labor was the common lot; popular education was recognized as a duty. There was a constant appeal to the capacity and worth of those upon whom the responsibilities of the state were laid; and neither the social position of royal governors nor the edicts of the home government succeeded in destroying the social equality or suppressing the popular judgment. The possession of landed property, which had been deemed essential to the power of the ruling classes elsewhere, was so universal that it constituted the natural foundation of a free state, in which all became in the end citizen-proprietors, and it developed into that general division and subdivision of land, and that economical and easy transfer of real estate, upon which De Tocqueville declared that the perpetuity and power of the American republic were established. Land-holding, it is true, varied in the several colonies. In the Plymouth colony, it was the establishment of small farms. In Massachusetts Bay, it was a division of corporation lands and individual proprietorships. In New York, it was a mingling of modified entail and homestead occupation. In Virginia and the Carolinas, it was the organizing of great plantations. But as

time went on, the system of the Pilgrims prevailed more and more, and spread over the vast territory now occupied by the great agricultural States west of the Alleghanies, whether the titles have been conferred by the Government or by corporations. The land-grants were small, even in the early colonial days. In Pennsylvania, for instance, one hundred acres to Jan Schoeten, three hundred acres to Hans Moens, two hundred acres to John Boon, and like amounts to their numerous associates; and now, from the land of the patroon to the land of the planter, the system of small holdings prevails, known everywhere as the American system of land-holding. Fundamentally, the patriciate opportunity was open to all.

And so it was and has always been with regard to the incidents and accidents of life. The honorable career of many early families is not yet forgotten, whose labors began in almost every walk in life, and who have reached a distinction which has entitled them to the respect and esteem of the generations who have followed them. Farmers, merchants, lawyers, clergymen, magistrates, by their public service and private worth, created a family record which for true merit cannot be surpassed. In the older States can be seen to this day isolated farm-houses, made famous by the sons who have gone forth from them into most distinguished and valuable labor. Turn to the histories of the early towns, and there may be found the names of the founders of our schools, the creators of our constitutions, the lawgivers and the reformers who laid the foundation of our national greatness. The colonial clergy were not more distinguished for their sound theological exegesis, and their magisterial control of the communities where they had a life-settlement over their Puritan parishes, than for the multitude of well-bred, well-taught, strong-minded, brave-hearted sons whom they sent into the busy world about them. At the close of the Revolutionary war, almost every town had its battle-scarred hero, who, under an imperial government, would have been loaded with largesses and titles, and who were content with the respect with which they were regarded, and the offices in the meeting-house and the school-district to which they were called. In the older counties still stand the mansions erected by the prosperous merchants who returned, after a successful commercial career, to adorn the spot on which they were born. And the pride and wealth of many a city is due to the wise and untiring exertions of these undaunted youths who started

from their humble homes on foot, to meet the dangers, and resist the temptations, and secure the successes, of an untried world. For these sons of farmers and clergymen, America furnished no patrician class, no legitimacy supported by the arm of the Government, but added the result of their lives to the grand aggregate which constitutes the pride and power of the republic. With their opportunity they were content. But we cannot forget that from the clergymen and cloth-makers and graziers and country gentlemen of the Old World have sprung the long and fortunate lines of Barings and Osbornes, and Spencers and Grenvilles, whose sagacity and courage and patriotism and thrift have been rewarded as kings alone can reward their subjects. There are those who know a solitary and secluded spot, where stands a marble shaft, on which it is recorded of the ancient owner of that deserted farm that he was a "Revolutionary soldier." That he had command, and was a prosperous citizen, may be added to that honorable record. But his country was too wide and his people too free to give him a title; and so he belongs to that widely diffused patriciate whose doors are open to every worthy and prosperous son. Dr. Johnson said, in his day, that a merchant was "a new species of a gentleman." Had he lived in ours, he would have discovered that republicanism, well founded and well organized, has created a people whose tone and standard entitle them to a place by the side of the controlling classes of any country on earth—a people who absorb every kindred and nation and tongue under heaven, and whose purpose it is, by education and culture, and recognition and all refining and ennobling influences, to establish a citizenship as proud and powerful as a peerage.

The more recent history of our country shows us that the patrician element means simply the strongest popular element, and that it is constantly receiving new strength from the great mass of the people,—the strongest popular element being that portion of the people engaged in developing the mental, moral, and material growth of the republic. This power is confined to no condition and no section, and depends not on race or genealogy. Family authority amounts to but little in a country where no provision is made for the perpetuation of a family name or family possessions. But it often occurs that a fortunate conjunction of qualities, partly inherited and partly developed by surrounding circumstances, will produce a force which will

make itself felt, and will be recognized by all men. It is not an accident that one community distinguishes itself above all others. The power which does this can be traced through many ages, and the faculties which accomplish it can be discovered through many, perhaps inconspicuous, generations. A group of district scholars separates in an unknown village, goes out into the world, their ways parted apparently forever, and suddenly they find each other in high and important positions, places of honor and responsibility,—one, it may be, in the Executive mansion of our Federal Government; one holding foremost rank in the army; one associated with the Supreme Bench; one making laws in the lower house of Congress. Can it be supposed for a moment that this is accidental? Trace that group back to its origin, and it will be found that many generations of heroic endeavor lie behind it, and that many streams of good red blood have centered there. And when another generation comes upon the stage, it will turn to that village with respect and reverence, and will accord to that group an honorable place in history, and to its descendants a title to national regard and consideration. This is the origin of American vigor, and this the only title the American people can bestow. The heroes of a great war take their places at its close among the people from whose ranks they stepped forth to their greatness, and perform their part of the toil and drudgery of the world around them. They may hold no prominent position in the community, but whenever the events in which they were engaged are brought to conspicuous public attention, they become heroes at once, the country is at their feet once more, and their descendants are recognized as the heirs of an enviable possession—the untitled nobility of a great free republic. And, while the world pauses to admire the accumulations of great wealth, and recognizes the powerful combination of faculties which develops great enterprises, it reserves a warm place in its heart and a sacred place in its memory for those who, by the exercise of heroic faculties, have performed deeds which would be entitled to great eminence and substantial rewards in those lands where recognized station and power are counted as the highest tribute the government and a grateful people can bestow.

To this view of the patrician element in American society it may be objected that it makes no provision for the perpetuation of those faculties and qualities which all the world admires, and

on which the perpetuity and power of a nation are supposed to depend. But how is this? Unlike the patriarchal democracies of India, and Greece, and Asia, whose primitive equality always disappeared, and upon whose decay aristocracies always sprang up, to be followed by feudalism and royal power, the democracy of America wanders farther and farther away from all social classification, and trusts to its own forces for the production and development of those lofty characteristics which control the institutions and constitute the power of every great nationality. Will the generations to come inherit mental and physical qualities which will fit them for the responsibilities belonging to the conservators of state and society—qualities as necessary to preserve republican institutions in their full force, as are the powers developed and transmitted by a recognized patrician class for its own strength and perpetuation? In both cases, the external and internal, the material and spiritual, influences operate under the same law. If by association and surrounding influence a patrician type can be established, does it not follow that in the same way social and civil institutions, the mental and moral operations, the modes of education, and the duties and obligations of a republic may establish a high type of citizenship which will be sensitive with regard to its rights, and quick and bold to maintain them? Ribot says: "In a people the sum of psychical characteristics which is found throughout its whole history, in all its institutions, and at every period, is called the national character. The successes and reverses of a people do not depend on their form of government, but are the effect of their institutions. Their institutions are the effect of their manners and their creeds; their manners and creeds are the effect of their character. Nor can it be seriously doubted that character itself is also an effect. It is extremely probable that every character, individual or national, is the very complex result of physiological and psychological laws." That heredity plays as important a part in the formation of national as of individual character, there can be no doubt. Having recognized the influence of physical environment, and of those "latent silent sensations" also, "which do not come into consciousness, but still are ever thronging the nerves of sense" upon the individual, we can properly recognize their influence upon the nation. The effect of these laws has undoubtedly given the American heredity its high standard.

Huxley noticed that the American physical development has not declined. Even the most careless observer must notice that the American moral and intellectual development has not declined. The love of freedom, the mental activity, the chivalrous courage, the devotion to a principle, the intense feeling, the keen and quick sentiment, the self-assertion and ambition, which characterized the fathers who colonized, freed, and established the American nationality, have descended to their sons in measure proportionate to the demands and exigencies of the times. Soil, climate, institutions, have all made up the American, who possesses as a national characteristic the proud self-reliance which in other ages and on other soils has established a powerful social class, and has hedged it about with supreme rights and privileges. It is the advocates and promoters of education, the religious teachers, the lawgivers, the press, the authors, the founders and builders of great enterprises, the active, industrious, intelligent mass, drawn from every walk in life, who constitute in any way the patrician element of American society—the lovers of art, and science, and literature, the natural allies of all those who in any country believe in the capacity of the people to advance to the farthest verge of social and civil progress, and who believe also in mental and moral elevation. From this mass come the “fathers’ children,” the heirs of the only nobility which cannot die out, the only titles which depend not on wealth and power. This vital force of the republic is as fixed here as are our republican institutions, and is our national inheritance. Said Bentham to the Americans of his day: “Beware of an hereditary nobility. The patrimony of merit soon comes to be one of birth. Bestow honor, erect statues, confer titles, but let these distinctions be personal. Preserve all the force and all the purity of honors in the state, and never part with this precious capital in favor of any proud class that would quickly turn their advantages against you”: a warning which has not been forgotten, and the observance of which has given the American republic a more permanent and powerful social organization than has ever been built up on classification and legitimacy in their proudest and most prosperous days.

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